

Series: *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*
Part 2: *Living out the Sufficiency of Christ (chapters 3-4)*
Lesson: *All Wrapped Up In Jesus, Part 6 – Our Community Involvement*
Text: **Colossians 4:2-6 (L14)**
Date: **Sunday, April 29, 2012**

*Colonial Hills
Baptist Church*

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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TEACHING TIP

The introduction is intended (1) to set the text within the framework of a specific topic that it addresses and (2) to create need within your students. Regarding that first purpose, as one studiously reads through Colossians 4:2-6, he/she should recognize the evangelistic flavor of it. Within the larger context of 3:1-4:6, he/she will discover that it continues the Christ-wrapped emphasis we've been studying, commanding us to bring Christ into the community with us and answering the question, "How do I wrap up my unsaved community in Jesus Christ?" Notice that we've gone from specific to general, from internal to external, considering Christ-wrapped hearts, behavior, church, family, workplace, and now community involvement.

Concerning the second reason behind our introduction, you will discover this lesson's application to begin in the first several paragraphs. This will help everyone immediately recognize their need for this text and lock in to how God's Word needs to change them in this area. Creating need in the introduction will cause the full weight of this passage to make a more immediate impact.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Colossians 4:7-18 – *Christian Partnership*

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, people love being a part of a community. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines "community" as "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals." Those shared commonalities may be our hometown (e.g., within the Fishers community), our neighborhood (e.g., within the Villages community), or even our hospital (e.g., Community Health Network). We often think of a church as a community of faith, a club as a community of like-minded enthusiasts, or a school as a community of academicians. Communities provide us with environments of safety, common knowledge, like-mindedness, belonging, and pride. We enjoy being identified with certain communities.

Communities are the natural byproduct of the image of God in humanity, in that God created humans for relationships (cf. Genesis 2:18; 3:8). When humanity's relationship with God was broken through the Fall, God initiated a

plan through which humans could be restored to Him in a new community setting, represented by His Son Jesus Christ (cf. Colossians 1:18-22). While individual humans are individually responsible before God, God has often seen fit to deal with humanity in community form (e.g., Israel, the Church, the Bride of Christ, nations, etc.). We could say that “community” is God’s idea.

When a person is saved, his community involvement is forever changed. He is transferred from the community of darkness into the community of Christ (Colossians 1:13). The community of the world is discovered to be temporal and destructive (Colossians 2:8, 20; cf. I John 1:15-17), and the community of the church is understood to be the passion of the Savior (Colossians 1:18; 2:19; cf. Acts 20:28). The believer’s “attitudes, interests, and goals” are changed from fleshly (Colossians 1:21; 2:13, 20) to spiritual (Colossians 1:22; 2:11, 14), and thus, he is identified with a new community (Colossians 3:10-11), the community of Christ (Colossians 3:4).

For the believer, then, the question is not which community he should be a part of, nor is it how he might change communities from one of certain destruction to one of righteousness. Those questions have been taken care of, since Christ has rescued Him and placed him “in Christ” and that community of life. He has a new community identity, and by faith he must live that way (cf. Hebrews 10:32-11:40).

After this “new community” entry, the believer is confronted by this question: how should he relate to the “earthy” communities round about of which he is no longer a true member (cf. Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13; 13:14)? Since his community identity is heavenly, should he involve himself with the communities on earth, and if so, to what extent?

Our Savior, Himself, answered that question in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17. In verse 16, Jesus recognized that the disciples for whom He prayed didn’t belong to the community of this world; nonetheless, He prayed in verse 15 “not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil.” Christ never advocated a monastic model that removes oneself from the decent physical communities of society (cf. Matthew 28:19; John 15:16). While some community involvement would be completely antithetical to the life of Christ and should be avoided, we should use decent community involvement as an opportunity to manifest the sufficiency of Christ to others (cf. Matthew 5:16; I Corinthians 5:9-10).

So, bottom line, the key aspect of community relation that has clearly changed for a believer is not involvement (although his involvement should be consistent with Christlike characteristics), but purpose. Every believer must understand what is the Christ-given purpose behind his/her community involvement. Since he/she represents a higher community identity, each believer should both reflect and recruit for that community and its Head. This is his/her purpose for “earthy” community involvement.

Thus, a believer should engage in his town meetings for a greater reason than just to affect political policy. A believing teenager will be involved in his school’s sports program for a larger purpose than just to improve as an athlete. A Christian will join the community improvement work group to accomplish more than just the beautification of a neighborhood. A saved mom will help at a pregnancy center to do more than just save innocent physical life. Grandparents will participate in the Old Home Days events for a deeper reason than just to reminisce. Christians will enter the grocery store, the bank, the shopping center, etc. with a more lasting focus than just accomplishing an errand. Christ-wrapped Christians will approach all of their “earthy” community involvement with the purpose of making an imprint for Christ.

Our purpose behind involving ourselves in the community is to speak and show the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.¹ This is Jesus-wrapped community involvement. In Colossians 4:2-7, Paul practically teaches us how to wrap ourselves up with Christ before we make contact with the lost community around us, and how to do so while making that contact.²

BEFORE OUR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, WE SHOULD ENGAGE IN PREPARATORY PRAYER (vv. 2-4).

Paul’s first exhortation for redemptive community involvement deals with pre-contact. In other words, Paul answers the question, “What should I be doing to get ready for purposeful community involvement?” The answer is to engage in preparatory prayer.

Paul’s imperative is to “continue in prayer” (cf. Acts 2:42; 6:4; Romans 12:12). Paul encourages the Colossians to consider the lost community with the mindset of persistent, consistent, habitual, regular, continual, devoted prayer. Such prayer should be both for our own potential ministry and for the potential community ministry of others.

1. Prayer for our ministry (v. 2)

Regarding preparatory prayer for one’s own ministry, Paul writes (lit.), “Keeping alert in it [that is, *in prayer*] with thanksgiving.” Notice two aspects of this personal preparatory prayer.

¹ With this theme, Paul has come full circle in his burden for the Colossians: from personally understanding the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ (chapters 1-2), to being wrapped-up with the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ (chapters 3-4), to helping other people understand and live out the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ (4:2-6).

² That this passage deals with the lost community around us is evident by the prayer for an “open door” of evangelism in verses 2-4, the word “outsiders” (“them that are without,” KJV) in verse 5, and the idea of being able to “answer” (lit.) “each one” of those outsiders in verse 6.

a. Pray with alertness.

In essence, Paul is telling us to pray with our eyes wide open. As we pray, we need to “keep alert.” The question should be asked, “Alert for what? What are we watching for?” In the context, Paul seems to be prodding us to be praying, looking for, and taking opportunities of witness for Christ. This interpretation is supported (1) by Paul’s admonition in the next verse for us to be praying “also” for others to have doors of ministry opened to them by God, and (2) by his injunction to be (lit.) “making the most of the time [or *opportunity*]” in verse 5. This consideration alone (i.e., that we should be praying with alertness about our potential evangelism) probably brings great conviction, for few of us pray for opportunities to speak and show Christ to others, and fewer still take the opportunities that are afforded. What will empower us to pray earnestly and sincerely for these opportunities? What will motivate us to make the most of those opportunities?

b. Pray with thanksgiving.

Paul writes to “keep alert in prayer with thanksgiving.” As we rehearse to ourselves the gospel message that we hope to share and as we revel in the reality that we have fully participated in that message (cf. Colossians 1:12-14; 2:10-15), such thanksgiving cannot but compel us to pray for occasions to share that truth and then constrain us to proclaim it whenever we can. At some point in your personal history, someone made the most of an opportunity with you, and you heard the gospel; God ordained that opportunity, and He saved your life. Thank Him every day for that reality, and let that empower you unto boldness and faithfulness in your personal witness.



Application: What are three key applications that are thus far commanded of us? (1) *we must continually pray for opportunities to speak and show Christ, (2) we must regularly take those opportunities, and (3) we must habitually ready ourselves for the opportunities by thanking God for the gospel and our participation “in Christ.”*

So, work backwards: if you’re not finding opportunities to share the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ with others, then perhaps you’re not praying for those opportunities; if you’re not praying for those opportunities, then perhaps you’re not regularly meditating upon and thanking God that He’s already involved you in His new community.

2. Prayer for others’ ministry (vv. 3-4)

Paul continues with the theme of prayer in verses 3-4 and challenges us to praying for the redemptive community involvement of others, too. Our preparatory prayers on the behalf of others’ ministry should have two key requests.

a. Pray for God to open doors.

Paul asks the Colossian believers to be (lit.), “praying at the same time also for us, that God might open to us a door [for] the Word to speak the mystery of Christ, for which also I have been bound” (v. 3). Our prayers should be that the One who is not willing that any should perish (cf. II Peter 3:9) would grant to other believers opportunities (i.e., “a door”) to share His salvation message with the lost. As for ourselves, we should pray that our brothers and sisters (1) have opportunities to speak and show Christ, (2) are prepared to take those opportunities, and (3) do indeed take those opportunities.

In this context, we discover Christians being encouraged to pray for those who are engaged in what we might consider “full-time ministry,” that God would open doors for them to share the gospel, for this is what they’ve given their very lives to do (i.e., “for which also I have been bound”). Paul’s statement about being “bound” for the sake of the gospel, yet still desiring a “door” for evangelism, demonstrates that God can provide opportunities to witness of Christ even in the most unlikely of places.

b. Pray for men to appropriately speak.

In cooperation with God’s opening of “doors” is man’s faithfully walking through. Thus, Paul also asks for prayer (lit.) “that I might make it [i.e., *the mystery of Christ*] known as I should speak [or, *as it is necessary for me to speak*]” (v. 4). Paul wants to “speak” the gospel (v. 3), but he wants to “speak” it as he should (v. 4)—that is, he wants to “make it known” consistently (“as I should”—cf. Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 9:16), clearly (“make known”), and boldly (cf. the sister passage in Ephesians 6:19-20).

Paul knows that the mission of his team and all believers is to proclaim Christ and His mystery of saving grace so that people are presented perfect in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:25-29). Thus, he solicits prayers on the behalf of that mission, that God would open doors for this mission to be accomplished and the people would be prepared and proactive when those doors are opened.



Application: How can we accomplish the fulfilling of this first vital part of Christ-wrapped community involvement—engaging in preparatory prayer? How should we participate as a corporate church in this ministry of prayer? How can we inculcate this habit within our children? *Open discussion.*

Transition: While many of us struggle even with this first point of purposeful community involvement, we would probably prefer to just work on that one area and then just stay there. But Paul doesn't let us. Having commanded us to engage in preparatory prayer before contact with the lost community, he now assumes that we will come into contact with it, and he exhorts to do so with initiatory evangelism.

**DURING OUR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT,
WE SHOULD ENGAGE IN INITIATORY EVANGELISM (vv. 5-6).**

When it comes to our actual contact with the lost community, our purpose is to speak and show Jesus Christ. And, as we saw even in the preparatory phase, we should be taking the initiative in fulfilling that purpose. In verses 5-6, Paul describes what initiatory evangelism looks like.

1. Evangelize with wisdom (v. 5).

Paul first tells us to (lit.) “behave with wisdom toward the outsiders,³ making the most of the opportunity.” The participle phrase “making the most of the opportunity” serves either as the means/manner of wisdom (i.e., we demonstrate wisdom by making the most of the opportunity – cf. NAC) or as the purpose of wisdom (i.e., we exercise wisdom in order to make the most of each opportunity).

If means/manner is understood, then Paul is admonishing us to prove our wisdom (i.e., knowledge applied or skillful living) by allowing our gospel knowledge to impact us with this conclusion: “I will make the most of every opportunity to share with others what Christ has graciously shared with me.” The person who lives with that mindset demonstrates that he is indeed a wise person (cf. Psalm 90:12; John 9:4; Romans 13:11-14).

If purpose is intended, then Paul is teaching that wisdom is necessary to make the most of every opportunity. In other words, we need the skill to take our knowledge of the gospel and weave it into as many opportunities as possible; we need wisdom in order to be evangelists. This seems to be the preferred interpretation based on Paul's teaching throughout Colossians of the need for wisdom in order to teach and warn others as we ought (1:28; 3:16) and his understanding of Christ as the source of that wisdom (1:9; 2:3).

³ Cf. I Corinthians 5:12-13; I Thessalonians 4:12; I Timothy 3:7.

This interpretation highlights the missional living that Paul is expecting from these believers.⁴ He is insisting that we be ready to take advantage of every opportunity possible to share and show Christ to the lost community around us, and we therefore must be conducting our entire lives with the wisdom of intentionality and creativity in that evangelism. Bottom line: be wise and evangelize!



Application: How can we develop the wisdom that intentionally and creatively takes advantage of the opportunities for which we've been praying to share the gospel? (1) *Study the evangelism of Christ to learn how he was wisely intentional and creative in taking advantage of opportunities to share His salvation with the lost community around Him⁵; (2) think about what some of those opportunities may be, and prepare ahead of time how you will start the conversation and where you will lead it; have a personalized plan for sparking a spiritual conversation⁶; (3) study the lost around you to learn what their needs and interests are, and use that knowledge as a “door” to start a relationship or conversation; (4) open your eyes of faith to discover the many “doors” that God may have already opened up for you, but that you've been disobediently blinded to*

2. Evangelize with graciousness (v. 6).

A second aspect of initiatory evangelism is graciousness. Paul writes (lit.), “Your speech [or word] [must] always be with grace,⁷ having been seasoned with salt, in order to know how you should answer each one [or, in order to know how it is necessary for you to answer each one].” Wise evangelists will be careful to ensure that their most obvious evangelistic tool is kept in good working order—that is, they will be careful to flavor their speech with graciousness and attractiveness (cf. Luke 4:22). “Seasoned with salt” carries the idea of flavoring and appropriateness (cf. I Peter 3:15).

⁴ “Make the most (lit. ‘buy up’) suggests an intensive activity, a buying which exhausts the possibilities available because they recognize that their time is limited” (Carson, D. A. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th Ed. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. Colossians 4:2-6.).

⁵ Cf. Phillips, Richard D. *Jesus the Evangelist*. Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007.

⁶ E.g., *The Exchange* relational evangelism program does this.

⁷ “‘In grace’ may be used in its full Christian sense of God's grace, in a generic sense of charming, or with a combination of both. The third option seems most likely.... The result is something like: ‘Let your speech be always with the graciousness appropriate to Christians, i.e., those who live in a state of grace’” (Melick, Richard R. Vol. 32, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Electronic Ed., Logos Library System in *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001. P. 324.).

We are here reminded that “both the content of words spoken and the method of speaking matter.”⁸ Paul has previously dealt with the content (i.e., “Word...the mystery of Christ,” v. 3), but here he stresses the manner of our speech. The text “calls for Christian graciousness and sensitivity to the person and situation.”⁹ Our speech should be gracious and attractive so that it may actually become a channel of grace (cf. Ephesians 4:29) as we seek to answer the surrounding lost community.



Application: Believers “are receiving God’s grace: [they must] let that grace be evident in the words they speak.”¹⁰ Christ-wrapped community involvement necessitates a thankful spirit for God’s grace demonstrated in humble gracious speech. As we saw in Titus 3:1-8, it is graciousness that won our hearts, and it is our gracious speech that will best show Christ to our lost community. Through wisdom and graciousness, we can engage in Christ-wrapped, initiatory evangelism.

What do the following verses contribute to the idea that our evangelistic speech should be coated with graciousness: Psalm 141:3; Proverbs 15:1, 2; 27:6; Ephesians 4:15? *Open discussion.*

CONCLUSION

Our purpose behind involving ourselves in the community is to speak and show the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. This is Jesus-wrapped community involvement. Are you involved? Are you focused on your purpose in that involvement? In order to wrap up our communities in Jesus Christ, let us engage in preparatory prayer and initiatory evangelism so that we might have the joy of winning souls from a lost community of darkness into a rescued community of eternal joy.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Carson, Colossians 4:2-6.